

Study ties I-270 traffic flow to economic health

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Source: Maryland State Highway Administration

A national transportation research group said that even as Maryland makes progress funding transportation projects, I-270 congestion ranks among the state's worst.

A report released on Tuesday by the nonprofit organization The Road Information Program (TRIP) included the Maryland State Highway Administration's 2014 ranking of the state's 30 worst traffic bottlenecks. TRIP made a connection between traffic flow and economic health — the same connection that local business leaders and elected representatives make.

Eight points along I-270's 35 miles make the [top 30 list](#). No. 1 is the intersection of I-270 and I-495, the Capital Beltway.

Two of the worst bottlenecks occur in Frederick County:

- Urbana, at I-270's intersection with Md. 80/Fingerboard Road, ranked No. 20.
- I-270's endpoint in Frederick at I-70 and U.S. 40, ranked No. 28.

At the worst choke points, commuters and deliveries may lose two hours in a dozen miles of backups, TRIP reported.

TRIP, based in Washington, researches, evaluates and distributes economic and technical data on surface transportation issues. Insurance companies, equipment manufacturers, distributors and suppliers, businesses involved in highway and transit engineering, and construction and labor unions sponsor the organization.

TRIP's 2016 report on Maryland links the state's economic growth and quality of life to a reliable transportation system. For commuters to get to work, for goods to move and for the economy to grow, transportation corridors must flow freely, TRIP concluded. Congestion and aging bridges and roads do not maximize economic potential, the report found.

A recent survey of more than 100 local businesses found traffic problems rank among the top concerns, said Elizabeth Cromwell, president of the Frederick County Chamber of Commerce.

"It's the one issue that applies to everybody ... for just about any size company," she said.

In addition to identifying trouble spots, TRIP's 2016 report cited improvements that have occurred since 2013.

Widening I-70 to six lanes at Monocacy Boulevard in Frederick made the list of 16 significant congestion relief projects statewide since 2013.

Many improvements to roads and bridges have been made since the Maryland General Assembly approved the Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013, TRIP reported.

Since then, TRIP credited the State Highway Administration with increasing a portion of its average annual highway investment 85 percent. The investment had an average of \$810 million annually from 2010 to 2012. The average increased to \$1.5 billion for 2017.

In 2012, the state reported that 30 percent of state-maintained roads and highways were in poor or mediocre condition, compared with 24 percent in 2014. The number of state-maintained bridges rated structurally deficient — worn but not unsafe — went from 97 in 2012 to 69 in 2015.

The I-270/Md. 85 bridge near Francis Scott Key Mall in Frederick was rated structurally deficient in 2014 and last year was funded for reconstruction scheduled to start next year.

Cromwell said the chamber was particularly interested in getting the state to fund the Md. 180 bridge over U.S. 15 at Solarex Court in Frederick. The state budget included \$31 million for the project.

The chamber was driven by major employer AstraZeneca's plan to expand, needing to get more employees moving on and off campus easily. The improvement will benefit anyone on the route, however, Cromwell said. A single electrician or a shift of workers will benefit from open roads, she said.

U.S. Rep. John Delaney, D-6th, agreed with TRIP's findings in a statement his office emailed on Tuesday.

"I hear from Marylanders about I-270 congestion every single day, and it is one of the biggest quality-of-life issues in the state and holding back economic growth," Delaney said.

To help fund transportation projects, Delaney said, he co-sponsored the Infrastructure 2.0 Act, H.R. 625, which has been referred to the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment. H.R. 625 would tax certain foreign income and establish the American Infrastructure Fund to collect and disburse the revenue for infrastructure projects.

"I-270, and bottlenecks like it, such as I-81 in Washington County, is part of the reason why I've ... authored legislation to significantly increase federal highway funding and create a new national infrastructure fund that Maryland could access for additional financing," he said. "Last year, when I collected infrastructure stories from constituents and delivered them to House leaders, the crushing traffic on I-270 was a dominant theme."

Amie Hoeber, the 6th District Republican candidate running against Delaney, said in an interview that she is not privy to all that has been planned, but she sees a need to do something about the regional traffic. She suggested changing the process for assigning project priorities and the process for funding them.

I-270 involves two counties and more than one government, which she said makes progress harder.

"I do know that it's complicated," Hoeber said. "It's a combination of federal funding and state prioritization. ... The state ought to be more in control."

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I-270 points among top 30 bottlenecks

Rank	I-270 location
1	I-495 inner loop at I-270 spur
4	I-270 spur southbound at I-270
13	I-270 local northbound at Md. 124
20	I-270 at Md. 80/Exit 26
24	I-270 southbound at Md. 109/Exit 22
25	I-270 northbound at Md. 109/Exit 22
28	I-270 northbound at I-70/U.S. 40
29	I-270 local southbound at I-270

[TRIP 2016 report](#)